



Newsletter No. 3

14 Sept 2012

Even though **FSM** is less than nine months old, we already have close on 800 supporters. "Thank you!" to all *Friends* who are diligently encouraging colleagues to join - it makes a big difference.

It's not just humans who are being targeted by those promoting pseudo-scientific interventions - this newsletter includes good news for those who care for our feathered, furry and finned companions.

Website News

We are now testing a website discussion forum, so *Friends* will soon be able to share ideas and concerns.

FSM in the media

A concerted and serious attack to **FSM** has been mounted in the press since our previous newsletter. This is a clear sign that **FSM** has touched crucial issues regarded as threatening by the wide CAMs community. The criticisms, mostly predictable, are based on misinterpretations or fallacies. The main criticism is that **FSM** represents only a small, fringe group of self-serving conservative doctors, trying to stop the desirable process of integration between orthodox medicine and the myriad of complementary and alternative interventions. **FSM**, in fact, comprises a wide range of professionals in all fields of science and medicine and adheres to very broad and well-shared scientific principles.

An editorial in the July *Medical Journal of Australia* criticised the call by **FSM** to remove the teaching of complementary medicine from universities. *'The legitimacy of academic complementary medicine'* was written by academics who support alternative medicine, including Stephen Myers, professor of complementary medicine at Southern Cross University in NSW. The main veiled criticism is encapsulated by the sentence *"The debate on whether complementary medicine should be a university discipline, when seen from a sociological perspective, says much less about good science and much more about control and power"*.

A number of articles followed along similar lines with comments by colleagues and friends:

- [Bitter pill: Fight over science in medicine:](#)
- [The CAM debate in 7 memes:](#)
- [Complementary vs western medicine- both have a role in universities:](#)
- [Attack on complementary medicines 'undermines safety':](#)
- [Push to rid universities of alternative medicine:](#)
- [Anti-quackery group risks backlash: critics:](#) and
- [Alternative medicine row erupts.](#)

FSM rests on the simple principles enunciated in [the position document](#).

What's new since our last Newsletter?

Letters to universities and their responses:

A second round of letters was sent to ten universities which had not responded to our 2011 letter. These universities have courses which might include questionable content, as shown on an [Australian Skeptics table](#) listing tertiary institutions alleged to be offering non-evidence-based health courses under a scientific banner. Three more universities, University of Technology, Sydney, University of New England and Australian Catholic University have responded, but it is still unclear if their courses are based on credible science. So far, of the 39 universities, 18 have responded. We will continue to update [the table](#) on our website.

FSM would be interested to hear of other universities introducing, or planning to introduce, pseudo-scientific courses.

One of our new *Friends*, a student from the University of Sydney, who is currently studying Science, was recently looking across Australia for potential Honours programs. Concerned about some of their pseudo-science courses, including [Introduction to homeopathy](#), he wrote a letter to Southern Cross University in which he stated:

"I would be ashamed to study at your university. If you wish to defend the integrity and prestige of your institution you should have a high threshold of quality and insight into the courses you offer".

Good for him. We need more student voices!

Chief Medical Officer - review of unregistered therapies

The 2012 Federal Budget commissioned the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Professor Chris Baggoey, with the task of [identifying a range of alleged therapies](#), many of which, although covered by private health insurance, are not shown to be clinically effective. The Minister for Health has stated, *"the Private Health Insurance Rebate will be paid for insurance products that cover natural therapy services only where the Chief Medical Officer finds there is clear evidence they are clinically effective."*

Many of these interventions are covered by private health insurance. Services identified as ineffective will no longer attract the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate.

However, the CMO's purview does not include registered practitioners in acupuncture and chiropractic, despite ample evidence of their being ineffective for many of their claimed benefits. **FSM** has [written to the Health Minister](#) suggesting that the project be widened to include these interventions.

Chiropractic interventions for babies and children

August saw the publication of two excellent articles: in CHOICE magazine [Can a chiropractor replace your GP?](#) and in the US-based *Institute for Science in Medicine* (ISM) who published a [white paper](#) on chiropractic. In the US, Chiropractic is taught in 15 private colleges. No chiropractic school is affiliated with any university, nor has any attained 'Research University' status. The paper notes, *"all efforts to become part of a university have failed. Enrolment in chiropractic colleges decreased almost 40% between 1991 and 2002; one California chiropractic college closed its doors in 2011 because of declining enrolment"*.

Also in August, the NSW Supreme Court dismissed an appeal from a GP who had [been deregistered](#) for using spinal manipulation to 'cure' a wide range of diseases including depression and diabetes. Paradoxically, numerous Australian chiropractors openly promote similar practices, many targeting babies and children. Although the Chiropractic Board of Australia is aware of this, it remains silent. This highlights the lack of a level (evidence-based) playing field for all nationally registered health practitioners.

FSM sent out a series of letters about the inappropriate treatment of babies and children by chiropractors who claim that spinal manipulation helps health conditions such as ADHD, Asthma, allergies, bedwetting, colic and ear infection and is a substitute for vaccination.

[One letter](#)(*) was sent to the chiropractic organisations, including the [Chiropractic and Osteopathic College of Australasia](#) (COCA), the [Chiropractors' Association of Australia](#) (CAA), the [Chiropractic Board of Australia](#) (CBA), the [Australian Spinal Research Foundation](#) (ASRF), the [Chiropractic Council of NSW](#) and the [Council on Chiropractic Education Australasia](#) (CCEA). A [second letter](#)(*) was sent to the four universities teaching chiropractic. These organisation were asked to justify the 'subluxation' theory. **FSM** asked where they stand on these issues.

A [third letter](#)(*) was sent to healthcare organisations concerned about these chiropractic treatments, encouraging them to write to the Government, because the [Chief Medical Officer's](#) current investigation does not include chiropractic. It also requested that they issue their own warnings about the inappropriateness of applying chiropractic to paediatric problems.

FSM will keep you posted.

Submission to the ACCC on the Code of Conduct of Medicines Australia

A submission was sent to the [Australian Competition Tribunal](#) relating to the 17th Edition of Medicines Australia Code of Conduct. In the past the ACCC has imposed 'conditions' strengthening its provisions making it important for **FSM** to highlight our concerns.

[Click here](#)(*) to read **FSM's** submission.

A copy of the Tribunal's determination will be published on their [website](#).

Veterinary Scientists and alternative medicine issues

Many Australian veterinary surgeons are also concerned about the increasing problems with the infiltration of non-evidence-based medicine into veterinary practices. Friends now include 14 vets, including Prof Colin Wilks, who has been hard at work promoting evidence-based veterinary medicine as well as a general emphasis on a scientific approach to testing claims of efficacy.

The August issue of the *Australian Veterinary Journal*, the official publication of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), highlighted a major advance in policy as described in the president's report. Two resolutions regarding efficacious veterinary treatments were passed by the board. Within the body of the president's report are the following statements:

"The resolution means that therapies resolved by the Board to be ineffective cannot:

- *be the subject of AVA continuing professional development activities;*
- *earn AVA Vet Ed points;*
- *be promoted on AVA websites; and*
- *be promoted in AVA publications, including division, branch or special interest group publications."*

The resolution does not pretend to end the debate on evidence to support or reject any modality of therapy, provided that, if using AVA resources, both pro and con arguments are aired simultaneously.

A second resolution was passed simultaneously stating:

"That the Board agreed that the veterinary therapies of homeopathy and homotoxicology are considered ineffective therapies in accordance with the AVA promotion of ineffective therapies Board resolution"

This is a major step forward for the AVA. It is encouraging that our vet *Friends* continue applying scientific thinking to other therapies currently practised and claimed without evidence of efficacy. However, they realise that some future targets will be even more difficult than homeopathy to deal with, but there is now a solid policy base to apply the same evidence-based approach more broadly.

Therapeutic Goods Administration

In May, [draft guidelines prepared by the Therapeutic Goods Administration](#) were released. These required that the makers of complementary medicines (CM) would need to hold "expert reports" before their products could be listed on the register of therapeutic goods. The self-regulated [CM industry](#) claimed that many companies would be unable to comply, and so the TGA backed down and has now issued an updated draft, minus the requirement for an expert to conduct evidence reviews.

Submissions on the latest draft close [on October 22](#).

Australasian Science Magazine

FSM has been invited by *'Australasian Science'*, Australasia's only monthly popular science journal, to contribute a regular column.

The column, *'The Bitter Pill'*, will include articles written by *Friends*. We have permission from the magazine editor to include these articles on our website after they have been published.

Acknowledgments & Congratulations

A big thanks to *Friends* who have had articles published, who were in the news or on current affairs programs recently. Please let us know if you have published any relevant articles, or made any broadcasts, and where and when they have appeared.

Recent contributions include:

Prof John Dwyer	Healing Gurus cult resort (video - Channel 7 TodayTonight) Mystical Cures (video - Medical Observer Magazine) Turf war over who can claim the title of acupuncturist (The Conversation)
Prof Alastair MacLennan	A well rounded career - Professor Alastair MacLennan reflects on his career in obstetrics and gynaecology (MJA)
Karina Bray	Can a chiropractor replace your GP? (Choice)
ISM	Chiropractic - White paper
Choice Magazine	Vitamins
Dr Ken Harvey	It's worth the hassle (MJAInsight) Swisse vitamins' sweetener to doctors: complaint resolution (The Conversation)
Dr Mick Vagg	The CAM debate in 7 memes (The Conversation) Has regulation finally caught up with homeopathy in the UK? (The Conversation) Longer life through drinking coffee (The Conversation) Can you eat your pain away? Maybe so, in some cases... (The Conversation) A trifecta of wipeouts for major CAM modalities this week... (The Conversation)
Prof Steven Salzberg	Anti-Vaccine Movement Causes The Worst Whooping Cough Epidemic In 70 Years (US: Forbes)
Prof Ian Musgrave	Missing the point about evidence-based medicine (teaching and doing) (The Conversation)
Prof Ian Frazer	Catch cancer? No thanks, I'd rather have a shot! (The Conversation)
Bruce Arnold	A bit fishy: nutraceuticals, marketing and procedural justice (The Conversation)
Prof Chris Del Mar	Evidence-based medicine (Medical Observer)
Prof Shaun Holt	Can prayer heal the sick? (NZ The Dominion Post)

Skeptics Conference

The 2012 [National Skeptics Conference](#) is being held in Melbourne from Friday 30th November to Sunday 2nd December.

A national and international star-studded array of presenters and panelists include James 'The Amazing' Randi, DJ Grothe (President of the James Randi Foundation), Brian Thompson (Outreach Coordinator of JREF), Rebecca Watson (SGU blogger), Lawrence 'Unbelievable' Leung (as seen on TV!), Dr Rachael Dunlop, Richard Saunders, Lynne Kelly, Dr Krissy Wilson, Dr Ken Harvey (Choice Magazine Consumer of the Year Award), Adam van Langenberg, Meredith Doig, Stephen Mayne (media commentator and shareholder activist), plus many others including **FSM** Executive's Dr Cameron Martin & Loretta Marron.

Just a reminder, you can contact us at : info@scienceinmedicine.org.au (email) www.scienceinmedicine.org.au (website)
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